

Message Text

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SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

REF A. STATE 202732 B. CANBERRA 6180 C. KUALA LUMPUR 891

1. LESLIE A. GOODYEAR, UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR WESTERN SOUTH ASIA, INFORMED US AUGUST 15 THAT A "BRIEFING", RATHER THAN A MEETING, WOULD BE HELD SEPTEMBER 18 IN KUALA LUMPUR DURING THE COURSE OF UNHCR HARTLING'S VISIT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE BRIEFING WOULD PRESUMABLY TAKE PLACE AT THE UNHCR REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS THERE, AND INCLUDE LOCAL EMBASSY REPRESENTATIVES FROM ASEAN COUNTRIES AND FROM COUNTRIES OF TRADITIONAL IMMIGRATION. NO INTERNATIONAL MEETING WOULD TAKE PLACE IN BANGKOK ON INDOCHINESE REFUGEES.

2. EARLIER SOUNDINGS WE HAD TAKEN BOTH IN BANGKOK AND GENEVA WITH SENIOR UNHCR OFFICIALS INDICATED THEIR SKITTISHNESS ABOUT THAILAND AS THE VENUE FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INDOCHINESE REFUGEES.
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GILBERT JAEGER, CHIEF OF THE UNHCR PROTECTION DIVISION, TOLD THE REFUGEE COORDINATOR, BOTH IN BANGKOK EARLIER THIS YEAR AND RECENTLY IN GENEVA, THAT THE PRESENCE OF UNHCR MISSIONS IN NEARBY LAOS AND VIETNAM MADE THAILAND TOO SENSITIVE A SITE FOR SUCH A GATHERING.

3. GOODYEAR SAYS THAT THE UNHCR IS NOW LOOKING TO THE

SCHEDULED MEETING IN NOVEMBER BETWEEN ASEAN AND THE COMMON MARKET AS THE OCCASION TO RAISE THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEE ISSUE. WE POINTED OUT THAT SEVERAL SIGNIFICANT COUNTRIES OF TRADITIONAL IMMIGRATION WERE NOT MEMBERS OF THE COMMON MARKET, BUT HE COUNTERED THAT OUTSIDERS COULD NEVERTHELESS ATTEND THE MEETING AS OBSERVERS. HE BELIEVES THAT THE "PARTICIPANTS SHOULD PAY AN ENTRANCE FEE". HE SAYS THAT THERE SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT TIME BETWEEN NOW AND NOVEMBER FOR THE PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES TO PREPARE THEMSELVES TO PLEDGE QUOTAS FOR THE INTAKE OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. THEY WOULD THEN ANNOUNCE THE QUOTAS DURING THE MEETING.

4. COMMENT: AS DESCRIBED BY GOODYEAR, KUALA LUMPUR MEETING AND SUBSEQUENT ASEAN-EC SESSION SEEN LESS THAN CONTEMPLATED BY THE AUSTRALIANS. IN AN EC-ASEAN CONFERENCE REFUGEES WOULD HAVE TO TAKE THEIR PLACE ALONG WITH OTHER TOPICS. HOWEVER SUCH A SETTING MIGHT LOWER ANY UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS ON PART OF PARTICIPANTS AS TO ITS OUTCOME AS WELL AS ENCOURAGE AT LEAST TOKEN GESTURES BY THE EC GROUP. WHETHER THE FRENCH WOULD WANT TO HIGHLIGHT THEIR ONGOING PROGRAMS IN THAT SETTING OR IN A BROADER INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, WOULD BE A KEY QUESTION. MOREOVER, IT WOULD BE INCONGRUOUS IF THE US AND AUSTRALIA WERE PRESENT ONLY AS OBSERVERS, GIVEN OUR MAJOR REFUGEE ACCEPTANCE PROGRAMS. DESPITE THESE RESERVATIONS BELIEVE

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WE SHOULD GIVE SOME THOUGHT ON HOW TO USE THE EC-ASEAN MEETING ALONG THE LINES GOODYEAR DESCRIBED.

5. THE THAI WOULD BE INTERESTED IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE WHICH THEY WOULD VIEW AS A POSSIBLE FORUM FOR COMMITMENTS BY US AND OTHER NATIONS TO LONG TERM PROGRAMS ACCEPTING LARGE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES OUT OF THAILAND AND THE AREA. HOWEVER IF SUCH COMMITMENTS ARE NOT IN THE CARDS, A HIGHLY PUBLICIZED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE WHICH SIMPLY DEMONSTRATED RELUCTANCE OF COUNTRIES OTHER THAN THE USG AND AUSTRALIA TO ACCEPT REFUGEES IN ANY BUT TOKEN NUMBERS, COULD RUN THE RISK OF BEING COUNTER PRODUCTIVE AND HARMFUL IN TERMS OF THAILAND'S OWN ACCEPTANCE POLICIES CONSEQUENTLY WE AGREE WITH GOODYEAR ASSESSMENT THAT THERE MUST BE TIME TO ASSURE AN ADEQUATE RESPONSE FROM THE PARTICIPANTS IN ANY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, IN TERMS OF ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES. HARTLING'S VISIT AND THE KUALA LUMPUR BRIEFING MAY GIVE US A BETTER READING ON WHAT THE PROSPECTS ARE. ABRAMOWITZ

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